

## Commissioner's Corner

### Customer service: Faster, friendlier, easier.



I urge each and every one of you to join me in supporting Governor Perdue's initiative to make Georgia the state that provides the very best customer service. We should be star players for the Governor's Team Georgia, "ready to serve." I want our department to lead the team in becoming "faster, friendlier and easier."

You work here, so you know that at DHR, we have a lot of front doors: Every county DFCS office, every Child Support Services office, each of our state mental hospitals and county Public Health offices – in addition to local partners like Area Agencies on Aging, Community Service Boards, and Community Action Agencies. Every day people come to us through these doors with needs and expectations that must be our top priority. Why? Because it is about their families and their children. We are the front door for some of the most vulnerable people in this state. There should be no "wrong door" when they come to us.

The people of Georgia have a right to expect us to do the right work, the right way. Our programs help build strong families – and we all know what strong families look like. Strong families work; they raise their children; they avoid risky behaviors; and they take care of their loved ones of all ages. We should be making these qualities even stronger.

The right work gets us up every morning. When we treat our customers as if they were our own families, that's premiere customer service. It makes our day, and it makes a difference for the people who come to us for help.

What is DHR doing to improve customer service?

First, we want to know what you think, so we are going to ask you – DHR employees – how to improve our customer service, because you are the ones who provide it every day. The DHR employee intranet will have a special section on customer service that will include a link to a survey form. I urge all of you to fill out the survey with your ideas about making our services faster, friendlier and easier for our customers, based on your first-hand experience. The DHR employee intranet also features an employee blog. The blog was created to provide you with the opportunity to participate in discussion topics, provide your comments, or suggestions for future topics. We want to hear what you think.

Second, we are going to work on customer service at our front doors together. When I shop – and I love to shop – I remember the stores where people

care enough about me to ask if I found what I was looking for. DHR should care about that too, because the stakes are so much higher when our customers do not find what they need.

Third, we have hired a Project Manager to work full time on applying your best customer service suggestions and making sure we all stay focused on this effort. Her name is Malika Reed and you can read about her in this issue of Human Side.

Fourth, we will create one central telephone call center for people who ask about our services. That phone number will be answered by staff who really know what our programs have to offer, and who can help people reach the right office quickly. We will also revise our contact list, so all of you will be able to look up programs and services, not just organizational units, when you are helping people find what they need.

Fifth, we will simplify our paperwork, starting with the Medicaid application process. We will also make it easier for people to get birth certificates and other important documents from Vital Records by using the Internet.

Finally, we will recognize the best customer service with a cash award for those of you who excel at doing "the right work -- the right way." All DHR employees are eligible to earn these awards. To nominate someone, go to DHR's Intranet at <https://intranet.dhr.state.ga.us> and submit an application. See page 2 of the Human Side for more details.

Please know: I appreciate all that you do. 

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## Right Work - Right Way Award Program

By Camille Cunningham

The Georgia Department of Human Resources would like to celebrate and honor the employees who demonstrate exceptional customer service. By offering our services faster, friendlier, easier, you could earn a one time lump sum monetary award of \$100.00. This program, titled "Right Work, Right Way", recognizes those individuals who provide outstanding customer service by going above & beyond the expectations of daily duties. Recipients of this award must demonstrate exceptional customer service skills as it relates to engaging clients in work or work-related activities, building community services, technology, employee engagement, and prevention. The acts displayed may be single examples or consistent patterns of behavior.

Any DHR or state agency manager, supervisor, employee or customer may nominate an individual or any number of individuals for the award. Nomination deadlines will be the last business day of the quarter. Winners will be selected on a quarterly basis and announced in the following quarter on the DHR Intranet and showcased in the Human Side. This is an excellent opportunity for DHR to reward those employees who go the extra mile by offering our clients with exemplary customer service. Please download the nomination form via the DHR Intranet at <https://intranet.dhr.state.ga.us>.

## Keeping up with the times

By Lisa Moery

The Division of Public Health's Vital Records Branch is implementing a new online Vital Events Information System (VEIS). The purpose of this implementation is to provide high-quality customer service by making it faster, friendlier, and easier for Georgians to obtain official copies of their vital events documents -- primarily birth and death certificates.

Our current paper-based system will become an electronic one. It will cut down the amount of time in which customers receive records. Through the current system, customers receive their documents in weeks. The new system will allow for receipt of materials in days. This will improve the completion and accuracy of the records. Vital Records Director Richard Wheat expects VEIS to roll out throughout the state in January of 2007.

Birth certificates must now be mailed from hospitals to the Vital Records office. Once the VEIS system is in place, all the information will be sent online. When needed, the records can be edited directly on the certificate. One example of this is that when babies are born it often takes a week or two for parents to decide on a name. When VEIS is up and running, parents can add the name directly to the birth certificate from the computer. The

certificate will be live and complete. This will cut down on time spent mailing, correcting, and resubmitting paper documents. Our expanding population will be able to obtain birth certificates much more quickly than in the past.

The length of time it takes to complete a death certificate is going to be decreased significantly as well. Currently, funeral home directors must initiate a death certificate on paper, just as they did when the system was established in 1919. The funeral home must mail the document to a hospital physician, medical examiner, or coroner who must sign the document and mail it back to the funeral home. It often takes weeks for the deceased person's executor to receive the death certificate. Once VEIS is live this process will be handled online, and the death certificate, which is a crucial document to have in order to settle an estate, will be available in a matter of days. It is easy to see that customer service for funeral homes, medical certifiers, and family members will be vastly improved when VEIS goes live.

"Providing superior customer satisfaction is an integral part of the mission of the Vital Records Branch," says Wheat.

## Customer Service

By Malika Reed

As your new Customer Service Champion for the Department of Human Resources, I challenge each and every DHR employee to embrace a faster, friendlier and easier approach to your profession in providing our customers with the best service than any state in the nation. Commissioner Walker has charged us in this challenge as we are committed to strengthening Georgia's families.

This month (October) the Governor's Office of Customer Service (OCS) unveiled Team Georgia's four customer

service standards. These behaviors were selected collectively from the statewide Customer Service Champion group headed by OCS. The following standards are as follows:

1. Greet customers/employees promptly and courteously.
2. Listen attentively and understand things from the customers' perspective.
3. Be helpful.
4. Honor your commitments in a timely manner.

As we continuously strive to be the best in customer service in the nation, we must begin to change the way we think about the discipline of excellent customer service. Most importantly, it must start with YOU!

For this quarter (October – December) we will begin with the first standard, "Greet customers/employees promptly and courteously." Here are some simple tips to incorporate as you strive to be faster, friendlier and easier for your co-workers and your clients:



## Customer Service...continued from page 2

- Say friendly remarks to your customers and co-workers with a smile such as "Hello", "Good Morning/Afternoon", "Thank You", "My Pleasure", "I appreciate that",

- Greet employees/customers in the halls, on the elevator, in the restroom, in the cafeteria, in meetings and the elevator lobbies,

- Come to work on-time everyday,

- Return telephone calls promptly,

- Respond to e-mail promptly and friendlier with "Hi/Hello" and "Thanks/Thank You."

I know these may seem very simple, but if we begin to include these basic tips into our everyday lives, at work and at home, we will begin to take on a customer-centric culture at DHR.

Look for more Customer Service Tips in the next Human Side. 

## Grandparents Raising Grandkids

By Ari Young



In July, DHR Commissioner B.J. Walker announced a plan to support the thousands of Georgians who are raising their grandchildren. "Grandparents raising grandchildren is not a new concept, but that doesn't mean it's ever been easy. That's why we're announcing some new initiatives that will make it a little easier," said DHR Commissioner B.J. Walker.

In August, DHR began offering services to help strengthen low-income families. Now those grandparents who are caring for the children of relatives can go to any local DFCS, Child Support or Aging Services Office to get the support they need to help provide for their families. Before this change, depending on what a family might need, a grandparent could find themselves traveling to several different offices.


When a child first comes to live with a grandparent, there will naturally be one-time unexpected needs that will have to be met. To help make sure these families can meet those needs, DFCS will provide one-time financial assistance, for qualified grandparents who meet income requirements. This assistance will help to cover basic needs like food, clothing a school supplies.

DFCS will also assist grandparents in finding child care. Through a program known as Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS), childcare assistance is provided for qualified applicants. Thanks to CAPS, parents and guardians can choose a childcare provider. The amount a parent pays is based on their ability to pay. Before Commissioner Walker announced DHR's support for grandparents, they had to be working or involved in a job training program to receive child care support. Those requirements are now being waived for grandparents over age 60 or with a disability.

Under the Commissioner's plan grandparents with Child-Only TANF may be able to receive an additional \$50 per month for each child to help cover the costs of raising a grandchild.

Not only is DHR providing more financial support for grandparents raising grandchildren, but caseworkers have been trained to work closely with these families. These DFCS "Navigators" will be available to help guide families and locate the resources they need.

This new plan to support Georgia's nontraditional and extended families provides support in addition to existing programs provided by DHR, such as TANF, Medicaid and Food Stamps. Families still must meet the basic eligibility requirements to benefit from these programs.

Additional services for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren include Information and Assistance, Caregiver and Kinship Care Program services and other services for seniors provided through the Area Agencies on Aging. 

## Training - Getting Better At It

By Barbara Joye

DHR's Office of Human Resource Management and Development (OHRMD) is preparing an online customer service training course that everyone who works for DHR will take. OHRMD already offers two classroom courses that you can take at the state training facility at Two Peachtree Street in Atlanta, or OHRMD can bring them to your office at the manager's request.

- *Craft of Effective Customer Service*

A two-day course designed to develop and improve customer service skills to help staff effectively manage relationships with internal and external customers. The course will be for all DHR staff.

The focus is on learning and implementing tools for: Basic nonverbal, paraverbal and verbal interactions; problem solving; handling and making requests; defusing crises; recovering and closing. This course includes "The 4 R's of Customer Service," the BALM Model, and the Customer Service Interventions Tool Chest.

- *Telephone Etiquette*

A three-hour workshop, also available online, which is designed to discuss the use and misuse of one of the most common tools used to transmit messages -- the telephone. This course is intended for DHR employees, supervisors, and managers who utilize the telephone in the course of their business.

Participants taking this workshop will be able to: Comply with DHR expectations for properly making and answering telephone calls; use basic telephone etiquette to create a positive telephone impression; obtain or provide critical information when taking or leaving messages; identify appropriate use of voicemail; and handle difficult calls.

Contact Henry Carter at OHRMD for more information. 





# Random Acts of Kindness: A kind soul during desperate times

By Malika Reed

*Barbara Pastirik, a Division of Aging Services (DAS) Adult Protective Services coordinator, worked with a DAS team that helped people fleeing the war in Lebanon when they arrived at Hartsfield-Jackson Airport in July. She explains: "This was a nephew with an (elder disabled) uncle in a wheelchair who wanted to pay me, because he was not used to accepting 'free' services from a 'volunteer'. Instead, I gave him my business card, which is how he got my email address." His letter follows:*

... Barbara, since our encounter at the airport, I couldn't stop thinking of your real love, affection, self-sacrificing spirit, humility, mildness, gentleness, and your outstanding Christian qualities. You've been living in my heart! You are so special!!!

My uncle and I were so impressed by what you did for us. My uncle wished to see you and say good bye. He wanted me to say hello to you and to thank you for him. Barbara, I haven't met a person like you in a long time. We need people who should be loving and caring and mild-tempered like you. I really couldn't stop thinking of you and of your virtuous qualities. Keep up the good work! ... You are SO SWEET! May God bless you and your household.

## Went Out of her Way

Ivonne McGee, Office of Child Support Services worker in Hinesville, really went out of her way to help me and my child. I have not received child support hardly in 11 years! She happened upon my case and completed actions in such a timely manner that it makes me want to cry how much she put into my case. I have dealt with (two other states) with this same child support case for years and nothing was really ever done. When she contacted me I was skeptical but she stuck with it. ... I had to contact your agency and let them know that I know of one child support worker that really tries. She found the father of my daughter in the military overseas. I know that she put extra effort into this research. I want to say THANK YOU!

## Treated With Respect

... I found Sandra Floyd (Office of Child Support Services, Macon) to be helpful, considerate and professional – so much so that I asked for the name of her supervisor so that I could call or email and give Sandra a commendation. ... All too often I have called and was treated as if I were unimportant. The information your agency handles is very important to many, and I greatly appreciate being treated with respect. ... Thanks for the work your agency is doing, and a special thanks to Sandra.

## Made an Unpleasant Situation More Tolerable

I just wanted to comment on the excellent service that I received from Ms. Echols (Office of Child Support Services, Macon). I was very frustrated and confused about this process. Ms. Echols made me feel that she cared and she even went a step further by trying the contact numbers then and there! There was no "I will note the account and please call back in a few weeks." I just feel that if there were more employees there like Ms. Echols they could have made an unpleasant situation more tolerable. I just wanted to say thanks to her and let her know that she is recognized and appreciated.

## A Pleasant Experience

It is not often in our society today that you find dealing with a government bureaucracy to be a pleasant experience. I had such an experience this afternoon with your office.

One of our employees had been contacted by one of your representatives regarding missing child support payments. ... I called your offices. First of all my wait time was less than a minute. I find that amazing considering the caseload you must have to deal with. I spoke with Sharon Ussery, who proceeded in a most pleasant and efficient manner to pull up our employee's file and reviewed the payments with me. In a very short period of time we confirmed that there were no missing payments and no problem for our employee.

Ms. Ussery could not have been more helpful and it was obvious that she had an excellent knowledge of the information tools at her disposal. I was extremely impressed with the professionalism and helpful attitude she had. Please accept my appreciation and respect for an operation very well managed. *(Signed by the general manager of a manufacturing company.)*

## Made the Extra Effort

Thanks so much for making the extra effort to look up that old septic (tank) drawing. Saved us a bundle. We appreciate your professionalism.

## Quintessential professional

Mr. Eb Adedun conducted a hazardous material inspection of my home, where I had evidence of such substances as severe mold and mildew. Mr. Adedun was meticulous in his attention to detail; he was very thorough. He gave me sound, scientific advice on how to protect my home and always conveyed his suggestions in a language I, a layperson, could understand clearly. ... He also had a kind, genteel manner and presents himself in a manner that the DeKalb County Board of Health can be very proud of. ... IN short, Mr. Adedun certainly exceeds expectations and is the quintessential professional...

## Courage and caring

As a mother of two ill sons, I wish to express my sincere and deep thanks to (Jane Perry, director, Clinical Hazards Program, Division of Public Health) for initiating the investigation into the cause of Morgellons Disease. ... I know it takes tremendous courage to begin something new in the face of adversity and to challenge those who have taken an easy but erroneous path. I am deeply grateful to you for your courage, intelligence, integrity, and truly caring for those who are ill. My sons are feeling new hope because of your dedication to finding the cause of their illness.



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### Concerned and professional

I am writing this letter in reference to a problem in my neighborhood. . . Upon calling the Columbia County complaint line and going through all the necessary "chains of command" I was directed to M. Andrea B. Frazier. She was very prompt to return my call, and immediately began working to find a solution to the issues that needed to be addressed. She personally made a visit to the neighborhood, assessed the situation, and made the necessary decisions to try and rectify the complaint. I found Ms. Frazier to be very polite, concerned, and professional. Through her abilities to handle the situation in hand, my home and others are safe now.


### Saved jobs

. . . Had you and your staff been less inclined to help us (comply with regulations for on-site sewage management systems)

I am certain my energy would have been spent in salvaging a crippled company and figuring out how to let loyal employees go instead of shoring up the weaknesses in our operation. Thank you for helping us make corrections, come into compliance, and continue to serve our customers with integrity.

I would specifically like to commend two of your staff for their assistance and guidance to me: Scott Uhlich, Land Use Program director and Virgin Fancer, PHSO program consultant, both worked patiently and professionally as they simultaneously held (us) accountable to comply with the law while graciously guiding us toward resolution and improvement. . . You should be proud to have men like these two representing you and the Division of Public Health. *(Signed by the president of a plumbing company)*

### Will Never be Forgotten

I want to thank you for all of your help and Cancer State Aid. You enabled me to maybe save my husband's life. We are now starting chemo for kidney cancer... The kindness you showed me over the many phone calls I placed to you and the care for my darling husband of 37 years we were able to get through Cancer State Aid will never be forgotten. There are no words to express my thanks to you and the program. There are good loving people who need this program to continue. You helped us fight! 

## Changing Lives – Faster. Friendlier. Easier.

By Gwen Skinner


Most of us understand the importance of emergency numbers like 911. When you have a police matter, you know who to call. When you want to get directory assistance, you call 411. But who do Georgians, including law enforcement, call when they need urgent help with a mental health crisis? Who do you call to determine what services are in your community? Most people would not know what number to call and for many, not knowing has often meant doing nothing at all – but that's changed. The Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases has created Georgia's first statewide toll-free crisis access line, to ensure that every Georgian is as familiar with the new number as they are with 911.

Here's how it works: Georgians will call 1-800-715-4225 and an experienced and trained clinician will listen to their concerns and determine their level of need. The clinician will then provide information on an array of community services so the caller can make an informed decision; at that time, the clinician will immediately establish an appointment. Families will have choice and access to services that work best for them and their children. In some areas, mobile services will be available to go directly to the consumer.

With this new system, lives will be saved, families will be supported, and we will have an easier, friendlier and faster way to provide help to our customers. Before, Georgia had as many as twenty-

five crisis access lines across the state. Now, we have one.

Georgia's new crisis line is good news not only for consumers of behavioral health care, but also for judges and the law enforcement community. As police officers help to divert people with mental illness from unnecessary incarceration to community services, an essential tool will be knowing who to call.

Having one number to call and knowing what that number is will give everyone – consumers, concerned family members, law enforcement offices, and staff of social service agencies - new confidence that help is available. 

## FASTER. FRIENDLIER. EASIER.



## Child Support Services: *The key word is "service"*

By Barbara Joye

### Learning tools. . .

In April DHR's Office of Child Support Enforcement changed its name to the Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) to reflect its focus on customer service. OCSS Director Cindy Moss says "I am proud that we have already made major improvements that transformed the way our customers experience child support services – but a lot more is coming, including an overhaul of customer service throughout the agency. Our management team has been working hard on this for a long time."

Over the past couple of years OCSS installed a Constituent Service Portal that lets parents receive and provide information about their cases online instead of always having to call busy offices. The agency also eliminated paper checks so no one has to worry about their payments getting lost, stolen or delayed in the mail. A string of other improvements followed during 2006:


An automated system makes paternity test scheduling and result reporting faster as well as more cost-effective, so cases can be established faster. Also, parents who can't have the support they owe deducted from a paycheck (for reasons such as self-employment) can now request that the payments be automatically deducted from their bank account, so they don't have to worry about sending in a check on time each month. Finally, short messaging service is being made available to parents who don't use the internet. This means they can ask to receive news about payments to their account, court dates, and other events in their case through text messaging or messages to the telephone number of their choice.

A virtual call center and reorganization of staff in two new "hub" offices in Dublin and Albany have improved customer service for six urban areas – Atlanta, Augusta, Cobb County, Columbus, DeKalb County and Valdosta – that would otherwise be overwhelmed by calls and a high caseload. The call center handles each request on first contact instead of referring callers to a local agent. Specialists in the hubs monitor regularly paying cases and locate absent parents. This frees local offices in the six areas to concentrate on working with courts to establish cases and carry out the more intensive enforcement actions. The local offices also remain open to people who need face-to-face contact with a child support agent.

"We hope the virtual call center and specialized hubs will provide a model we can apply throughout the state," says OCSS director Cindy Moss. "We have already seen dramatic improvements in our ability to establish valid addresses for non-custodial parents, which speeds up the time required to establish a case so children can start getting support sooner."

Despite its achievements through improved technology and staff organization, OCSS understands that there's no substitute for respectful and caring one-on-one interaction with customers. For several months the agency's management team has been engaging in an intensive review of all OCSS services based on a problem-solving process called "G-Force" that has been used by other DHR divisions and offices. OCSS calls its version the Performance Improvement Environment (PIE). The team established customer service standards and gathered detailed data in order to identify the source of problems and spot troubled offices that need help. A Customer Service Task Force is observing a sampling of local offices and making recommendations for improvement based on best practices research.

In addition, OCSS offices throughout the state continue to address the needs of non-custodial parents who have trouble making their payments. The Fatherhood Program, which offers low-income non-custodial parents training and counseling through local technical colleges so they can improve their earning power, will hold six "summits" in the coming year to strengthen support for the program and has applied for grants to expand the services. Program staff will also visit prison pre-release programs to inform men with child support cases about their obligations and options when they return to work. Also, local offices throughout the state will continue their practice of offering "amnesty" days to parents in arrears so they can start paying and work out a plan to catch up instead of losing a driver's license or spending time in jail.

"One of our guiding principles is that everyone deserves professional customer service in a positive and caring manner, and we are dedicated to providing it," says Moss. 

Managers and staff can learn more about customer service from some of the following resources, recommended by the Governor's Office of Customer Service.

- *Super Service: Seven keys to delivering great customer service.... even when you don't feel like it!.... even when they don't deserve it!*  
– Val and Jeff Gee
- *Exceptional Customer Service: Going beyond Good Service to Exceed the Customer's Expectation*  
– Lisa Ford, David McNair and Bill Perry
- *Customer Service Training 101: Quick and Easy Techniques That Get Great Results*  
– Renee Evenson
- *The Fred Factor (How passion in your work and life can turn the ordinary into the extraordinary)*  
– Mark Sanborn
- *Great Customer Service on the Telephone*  
– Kristin Anderson
- *Coaching Knock Your Socks off Service* – Ron Zemke and Kristin Anderson
- *The Big Book of Customer Service Training Games: Quick, Fun Activities for Training Customer Service Reps, Salespeople and Anyone Else Who Deals with Customers*  
– Peggy Carlaw and Vasudha Kathleen Deming
- This website takes you to a consultant's PDF newsletter which contains some interesting articles:  
<http://www.nkarten.com/fancystickling.pdf>
- For the West Virginia Bureau of Employment's customer service guidelines, go to <http://www.wvbep.org/bep/New/CServiceManual>, then click on "customer service manual 2005."





